

# The Caribbean

## READ TO DISCOVER

1. What are some important events in the history of the Caribbean?
2. What cultural and population patterns are found in the region?
3. What activities support the economies of the Caribbean countries?

## WHY IT MATTERS

The Caribbean is a popular tourist destination for Americans. In addition, many people from the Caribbean have immigrated to the United States. Use [CNNfyi.com](http://CNNfyi.com) or other **current events** sources to learn about emigration from the Caribbean or about tourism opportunities there.

## IDENTIFY

Santeria

Caricom

## DEFINE

commonwealth

creole

voodoo

## LOCATE

Santo Domingo

Havana

San Juan

## History and Culture

Like Central America, much of the Caribbean's modern identity is linked to the period of European colonization. European settlers and the peoples they brought to the region shaped the cultures of the islands.

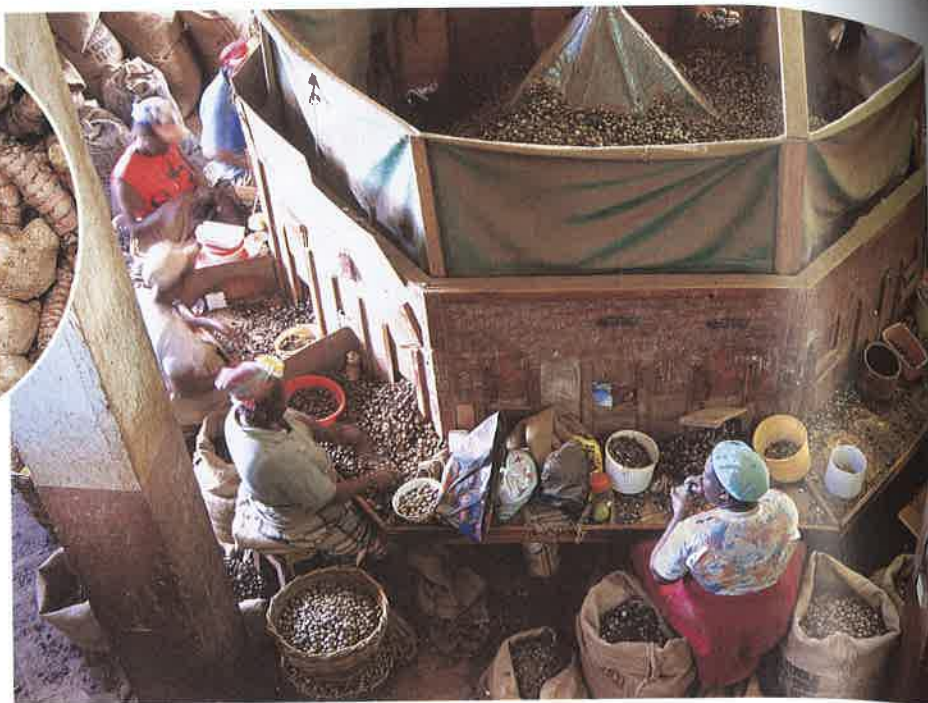
**Colonization and Independence** In 1492 Christopher Columbus landed on an island in the southern Bahamas. However, he thought that he had reached islands off the coast of Asia that Europeans called the Indies. Columbus was wrong, but the term West Indies stuck. People still use the term to describe the islands of the Caribbean region.

*Brimstone Hill Fortress on the island of St. Kitts takes its name from the volcanic stone, known as brimstone, that was used to build its massive walls. The fortress was used by both British and French forces during the colonial period.*





*European colonists established plantations throughout the Caribbean, and export-oriented agriculture is still common on many islands. In Grenada, nutmeg and ginger are two important export crops.*



The Spanish monarchs sponsored the voyage of Columbus, and the first wave of Europeans in the Caribbean was Spanish. They fanned out across the Greater Antilles looking for gold. The settlers brought bananas, citrus fruits, rice, sugarcane, and farm animals to the region.

When the Spanish found little gold, they lost interest in many of the small islands. However, the British, Dutch, and French competed for the islands. They reaped fabulous wealth from the sugar plantations they developed. Spain also developed sugarcane plantations in Cuba. To get workers for their farms, plantation owners turned to Africa. Over time, Europeans brought millions of enslaved Africans to the West Indies.

When slavery ended in the 1800s, former slaves could buy land if it was available. Some remained plantation workers. Others left the region, immigrating to Central America or the United States. Landowners then brought in laborers, mostly from South and East Asia, to work on the plantations.

Haiti won independence from France in 1804. The Dominican Republic gained independence from Spain by the mid-1800s. The United States took

Cuba and Puerto Rico from Spain during the Spanish-American War in 1898. However, Cuba then became independent in 1902. Other Caribbean countries did not gain independence until the last half of the 1900s. Puerto Rico remains a **commonwealth** of the United States. A commonwealth is a self-governing territory associated with another country. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens. However, Puerto Rico has no voting representation in the U.S. Congress.

*Indian, African, and European cultural traditions have combined to shape life throughout the Caribbean. In the Dominican Republic, for example, a blend of both Spanish and African cultures is found.*



**People, Languages, and Religions** The Caribbean's population is largely descended from the Europeans and Africans who arrived during the colonial period. Most of

the region's people are mulatto or otherwise of African descent. Nearly 40 percent of Cubans are of European descent. Haiti and Jamaica have the largest African populations in the region. Many descendants of Asian plantation workers live in Trinidad and Tobago. For example, more than a third of that country's people are East Indian. Small East Indian populations are also found in most other Caribbean countries. Jamaica and several smaller islands in the Lesser Antilles have small populations of Lebanese and Chinese as well. Most of the few Caribbean Indians who remain live in Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Aruba, and the Netherlands Antilles.

The official language in each Caribbean country or territory depends on which European country colonized or controls it today. In most places, the main language is Spanish, English, French, or Dutch. Spanish is spoken in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. English is also an official language in Puerto Rico. French and **creole** are official languages in Haiti. Creole is a blend of European, African, or Caribbean Indian languages. People on many other Caribbean islands often speak a creole language. In Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles, many people speak Papiamentu. This creole language combines elements of Spanish, Dutch, and Portuguese.

Most people living on the Spanish- and French-speaking islands are Roman Catholic. Protestants make up the majority on the Dutch- and English-speaking islands. African traditions strongly influence religion in some places. In Haiti, for example, **voodoo** is important. Voodoo is a Haitian version of traditional African religious beliefs that are blended with elements of Christianity. Followers believe that good and bad spirits play an important role in daily life. Like voodoo, **Santeria** blends African traditions and Christian beliefs. It began in Cuba and has spread to other islands. In the 1800s Asian workers brought Hinduism and Islam to the islands.

**Settlement and Land Use** Since 1960 the Caribbean's total population has more than doubled. About 36 million people lived in the region in 2000. About 70 percent of the population lives in Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic's capital, is the region's largest city. More than 3.5 million people live there. Havana, Cuba's capital, is home to more than 2.2 million people.

Population growth has created difficult problems for the region. The Caribbean islands have only one tenth the land area of Central America. Unemployment and underemployment are high. This has led to immigration to the United States, Canada, and Europe. Large Caribbean communities can

## Connecting to

## THE ARTS

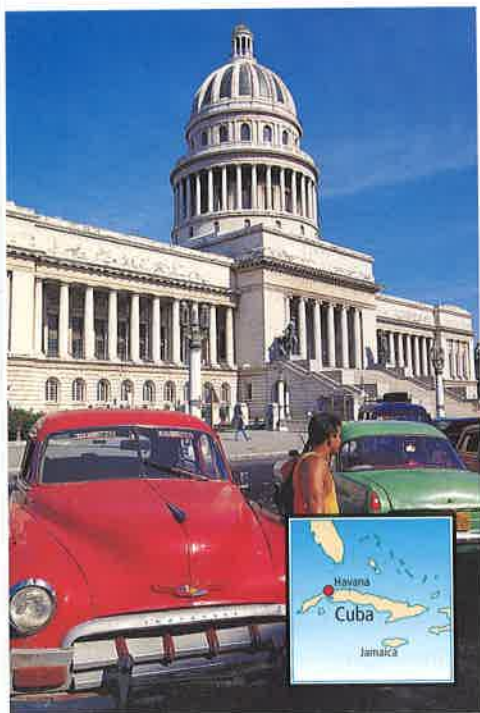
### Caribbean Music

Caribbean culture has contributed much to American music and dance. Calypso, a folk music from Trinidad, has ties to the music of Caribbean slaves of the early 1800s. It first became popular in the United States in the 1950s. More recently, reggae, salsa, and merengue have attracted a large American following. Reggae from Jamaica arrived in the 1970s. Salsa has its roots in the African rhythms and Spanish lyrics of Cuba and Puerto Rico. Merengue came to the United States from the Dominican Republic. It has long been part of rural folk music and dance traditions in that island country. Today people across the United States can find places to dance salsa and merengue.

**Drawing Inferences and Conclusions** What other part of the world has influenced the Caribbean music that has become popular in the United States?



*Steel drums, which originated in Trinidad, are a common element in Caribbean music. Steel drums are made from metal shipping drums and are played with rubber-tipped hammers.*



Since the 1960s the United States has banned trade with Cuba because it opposes Cuba's Communist government. As a result, most American cars in the country date from the 1950s.

be found in those places. For example, today more Puerto Ricans live in New York City than in San Juan, Puerto Rico's capital.

Another result of this population pressure has been increasing urbanization. People have had little choice except to move to towns and cities in search of new opportunities. Today more than half the people in the region live in towns and cities rather than farming communities. Partly because of this, most islands import much of their food.

✓ **READING CHECK:** **Places and Regions** What geographic factors have contributed to emigration from the Caribbean?

## Economic Development

Except for Cuba, most of the Caribbean countries and territories have market economies. Businesses and farms are privately owned, and their owners decide what and how much to produce. Cuba has a command economy. Its Communist government makes all the decisions about production.

**Agriculture and Industry** Despite efforts to encourage manufacturing, the region's economy has remained largely agricultural. Sugar, bananas, cacao, citrus fruits, and spices are the region's main exports. Jamaica produces nearly all of the world's supply of a seasoning called allspice. Most countries are trying to grow a wider range of crops. However, overall farm production and employment continue to decline. To promote industry and trade, countries in the region have formed an economic union called **Caricom**. Caricom is an abbreviation for the Caribbean Community and Common Market.

Cuba, the largest Caribbean island, is not a member of Caricom. In 1959 Fidel Castro came to power and soon after set up a Communist dictatorship there. The United States has banned trade with Cuba and restricted travel to the island. For years, Cuba concentrated on producing sugar on government-owned farms. Much of this sugar was sold to the Soviet Union. However, that country's collapse in the early 1990s severely hurt Cuba's economy. Recently, Cuba's government has emphasized the manufacture of farm machinery, steel, cement, clothing, food products, and consumer goods.

Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and several countries in the Lesser Antilles have also developed important mining industries. Puerto Rico has the region's

### INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD

About three quarters of the land in Barbados is arable, and most of it is used to grow sugarcane. However, in recent years, the government has encouraged farmers to grow a wider range of crops. **Based on the photo, how important do you think modern technology is for growing sugarcane in Barbados?**





most industrialized economy. This is the result of Puerto Rico's easy access to the American market, low taxes, and special training programs for workers. In addition, wages in Puerto Rico are generally lower than in the United States. This means companies can produce goods less expensively there. Still, unemployment is high when compared to the United States.

**Tourism** Many island leaders see tourism as the great hope for future economic growth. However, tourism also has its problems. On small islands, golf courses, resorts, and condominiums take land that could be used for farming or industry. Jobs in tourist industries are mostly seasonal, and pay is low. Furthermore, free-spending tourists often raise the cost of living on the islands. Plus, companies from developed countries build and operate most of the tourist facilities. As you might expect, then, most of the profits also go to these foreign companies. Still, tourism does bring needed income and reduces unemployment. Both of those benefits are important for island economies.

**READING CHECK:** *Environment and Society* What forms the basis of the economy in most of the Caribbean?

#### INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD

*Tourism is a huge industry in island countries such as the Bahamas, where it supplies about 60 percent of the country's GDP and employs about 40 percent of the labor force. What problems might such a dependence on tourism cause?*



## Review



**Identify** Santeria, Caricom

**Define** commonwealth, creole, voodoo

**Working with Sketch Maps**

On the map you created in Section 2, label the region's countries and Santo Domingo, Havana, and San Juan. Which city is the largest?

### Reading for the Main Idea

- Human Systems** What factors help to explain the high rate of emigration from some Caribbean islands?
- Human Systems** How and why has the collapse of the Soviet Union affected the economy of Cuba?

### Critical Thinking

- Drawing Inferences** Do you agree that emphasizing tourism is a good approach to economic growth in the Caribbean countries? Why or why not?

- Summarizing** How is the Caribbean's history reflected in its culture today?

### Organizing What You Know

- Copy the diagram. Use it to describe and then compare important cultural features of both the Caribbean islands and the countries of Central America. Where the circles overlap, identify cultural features that the regions share.

